



STRONG MAN STUNTS *Made Easy!*

by
George F. Jowett

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Strong Man Stunts Made Easy

By GEORGE F. JOWETT

ISN'T it strange how we connect certain things with certain events in our lives? Whenever the question of strength is mentioned the vision of the great George Hackenschmidt floats before my eyes. I can never forget the night when George jumped upon the stage from a stage box-seat to confront Jack Carkeek, who was then the wrestling champion of the world. He leapt from the ledge of the box like a panther, tossing away the robe that covered him. It was so dramatic—but not so dramatic as the climax it created. Carkeek was speechless with amazement. He—the great wrestler who feared no man. He staggered against the stage curtain as though he had been struck a blow, heedless of the words of challenge that streamed from Hackenschmidt's lips. Carkeek was like a man paralyzed. He made a few incoherent attempts to speak, and left the stage, but never for a moment did his eyes leave the magnificent form of the strange young challenger. The first murmurs of surprise from the audience became an uproar with everybody talking at once, thrilled by the marvelous specimen of humanity that confronted them. No wonder! If Hercules had been resurrected before them they could not have visioned a more spectacularly muscled body. The herculeanly classic lines of his body seemed to blaze with intense life. His muscles throbbed with the pulsating life of tigers held in the leash.

From the time I was a young boy, and today after meeting thousands of wonderfully built men, and beholding numerous prodigies of strength, I still thrill to the sound of his name and admire the marvelous strength that he possessed. Hackenschmidt was physically different from all others. His gigantic powers did not begin and end with an exhibition of one or two feats of strength, as is often the case with many strong men. He was overwhelmingly powerful at everything he did. I only wish you could have seen Hackenschmidt in all his physical glory as I saw him. You would feel as I do, because it is given to us all to admire strength and crave it for ourselves. We want it because we know it is the greatest possession a man can have. None of us like to be classified as weaklings or outdone in any physical test, for when all is said and done, we are all, at heart, "show-offs."

We love to display muscles for what they mean and demonstrate our strength for the evidence they provide.

Many of my books have been devoted entirely to the development of the different muscles in the body but this contribution is devoted entirely to the acquisition and use of strength. When you get the muscles you naturally wish to know how to get the most out of them and how to use them in such a manner as will prove that the muscles you have are of the worthwhile variety and are of the type that does not evaporate a few hours after you have finished the exercise. Usually, strength is estimated by the amount of weight you can carry, pick up, or lift, as compared with the other fellow. This brings us to the point that I have often discussed—the difference between sport and exercise. Your strength represents what exercise has given you, and strength sports should never be judged as the quickest and shortest route to getting great strength. They are the end—not the means to that end. Strength is the expression of your muscular energy. The heavier a man is, the greater poundage he should lift. If he falls short in his efforts, in proportion to what he should be able to do according to the size of his muscle and his body weight, it is mainly because his muscles have not been developed correctly along the right lines, and therefore, they lack the right amount of constructive quality which designates strength.

There have been many men with the same measurements that Arthur Saxon had at the body weight of 200 pounds but where is the man, irrespective of body weight and measurements, capable of the stupendous feats of strength that the great Saxon was capable of? He stands out as one of the greatest lights in strengthdom the world has ever been privileged to see. There has never been one to equal him before or since. Great men have come with tremendous claims, only to prove, in most cases, very disappointing. Others have shown a spasmodic type of strength. One day they would perform marvelously, but the next day they would fall off considerably. Not so Saxon. He was always the same—reliable and confident in everything he did, performing anywhere at a moment's notice and without so much choiceness of the feat he should do and the thing to do it with. His greatest performances are his "Bent Press" and the "Two Hands Anyhow" to arms' length overhead. He was equally good at any other lifts, but I select these two performances because they provide us with the facts that he raised overhead with one and with two hands in these two separate lifts, far more than any other man in the world has even been capable of.

Of course, science plays a wonderful part in lifting, but it does not make the load any lighter. It simply gives you a better ability to manipulate the weight and allow you to succeed where you would otherwise fail, despite the amount of strength you may have.

The "Bent Press" is a lift whereby a weight is lifted to arms' length overhead by bending sidewise under it. A few years ago this lift was the most popular of all. Its popularity was due to the influence of Saxon, not only over here, but in Britain also. In America we had several strength athletes who could compare favorably with the best of any nation. Such wonderful examples as Thomas Inch, Carquest, Holliday, and Joe Nordquest were actually taught by Saxon and I am proud to say I also had the same distinction, though then only a young boy—seventeen years of age. It was the aid I got from the great Arthur Saxon that enabled me to establish the World's Junior One Arm Bent Press record of 224 pounds which still stands. I only weighed at that time 147 lbs. stripped. In turn we taught others and the result was such splendid pupils as Owen Carr, Noah Young, R. L. Smith, and Matysek, among many others, but the World War commencing in Europe in 1914 swept most of these wonderful stars of strongmanism into its maul. Many never came back and others lost all interest because the great master himself had fallen a victim to the evil of war. Since those days there has not been a decent Bent Press man anywhere to equal any of the old brigade. There has been no one who has properly taught the method of training or the science of the one great feat that captivates the enthusiasm of every strength fan.

Saxon called the Bent Press the key lift in the sport of weight lifting and, to judge by the all-round strength ability all the Bent Press stars had, Saxon is right. It certainly teaches one the fine points in muscular leverage and as proficiency is acquired the strength fan develops into a strong man with remarkable lifting power and superb showmanship.

To succeed in the One Arm Bent Press, great strength is required of the latissimus dorsi, the trapezius, spinus erectus and the external oblique muscles besides strength of the arms and legs. Confidence and coordination are also very important. Perfection of performance in this feat is acquired *not* by straining under a heavy load but by taking a 75 lb. bar bell and mastering the technique. The muscles are developed to the state of capability by practicing just four exercises which I will explain to you

after I have given you the inside on the technique of the stunt itself. The placing of the feet is very important. They should be spaced about 18 inches apart. If you are going to perform with the right arm then the toes of the right foot should be turned in slightly, (See Fig. 1, position 1, front and back views), the right leg should be perfectly straight with the hip thrown out to provide a formidable bolster and support for the weight. The left leg

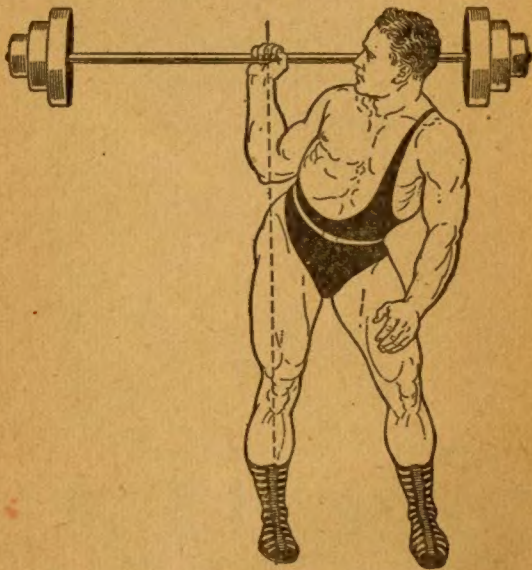


Fig. 1, Position 1, Front View

should be bent at the knee and the toes of the left foot should point straight forward. Practice getting the proper foot stand before doing anything else. This is very important. Most Bent Press enthusiasts fail through improper foot position.

In this feat it is a fact that the way you point your feet decides the direction your body will go. If the feet are pointed out your body will fall outward, away from the line of centralization. Placing

the feet in the manner stated, brings the body right where you want it—*under the weight*—and maintains the line of centralization, which in this case is the arm keeping in a straight line with the lifting leg throughout the performance. Now, let us pass on to the actual performance of the feat.

If you are able to jerk to arm's length overhead with one hand 100 lbs. you should use a total weight of 50 lbs. to practice the



Fig. 1, Position 1, Back View

Bent Press with and never exceed a total weight of 75 lbs. for practice purposes. The length of the bar should be 6 ft.

Take up your position with the feet properly spaced apart, grasp the bar by the center and, with one or two hands, lift the weight to the shoulder, bending sharply to the left side as the illustration shows with hip thrown well under the lifting arm.

The upper part of the arm should be allowed to rest well back, and the forearm should be in a direct straight line with the lifting leg, the non-lifting arm resting on the corresponding knee. As the weight is brought to the shoulder the bar should be moved so it is in a line level with the shoulders as shown.

Examine the two commencing illustrations, Fig. 1, Position 1, back and front views, particularly the back view, which shows you



Fig. 1, Position 2

exactly how the upper part of the lifting arm is seated on the ledge provided by the latissimus dorsi. The position is correct as the dotted line shows how perfectly the weight is balanced, being in a straight line with the leg. This is really your starting position. From this point you begin to bend sidewise and forward in a spiral, body-twisting movement. As you bend over to the left you bend the left knee and allow the left arm to slide over

the left knee to give support and balance. Keep on bending until the shoulder is between the knees as illustrated. See Fig. 1, Position 2. With the lifting hand push up against the bar. An effective aid to getting under the weight at this point is to bend the lifting leg. See Fig. 1, Position 3. You will simply



Fig. 1, Position 3

sink under the weight until the arm is straight. The actual lifting or straightening of the arm is done by the back as you bend away until the arm is almost two-thirds straight, then you lift with all your power to straighten the arm under the weight. See Fig. 1, Position 4.

It is a somewhat complicated lift but as long as you do not try to handle too much poundage when practicing you will very soon master the feat. It is simply a series of natural balancing move-



Fig. 1, Position 4

ments backed by your bodily strength to raise an object to arm's length overhead in the easiest and most natural manner.

Although Eugene Sandow is given credit for introducing the Bent Press it goes back much farther than Sandow. He undoubt-

edly was the first to introduce it before the English speaking public and he gave it to the public dressed up in all the superbness of his wonderful showmanship which never failed to thrill the beholders. He was taught the lift by Professor Attila, but Arthur Saxon did not learn the lift from either of the two. The lift originates with a very obscure German strength athlete whose name has temporarily slipped me. Nevertheless, Sandow and Saxon commenced the wave of popularity in this and other feats of strength which is greater today than ever.

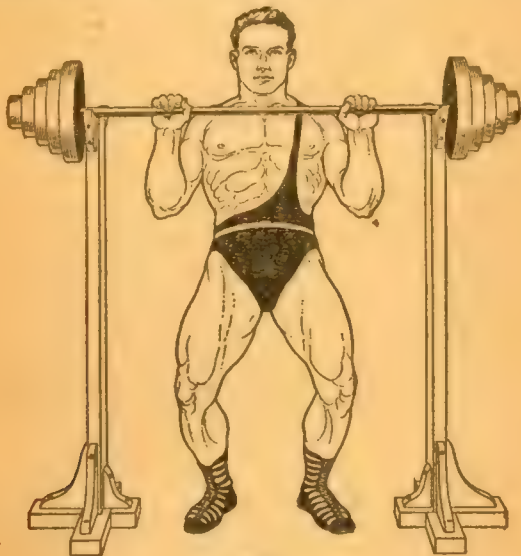


Fig. 2

Due to the fact that such great poundages can be raised overhead in this lift the body must be made able first, to withstand the great downward pressure thrown upon it. The ligaments and other muscular sinewy attachments must be made strong and be strongly seated on the bone and into the muscular insertion.

The next important step is control of balance.

The third is to make the body so strong where the resistance is greatest that never will there be any fear or danger of strain.

As I have already told you, four exercises are practiced to take care of these highly important factors.



Fig. 3 .

To begin with it will be necessary that you do a little rigging up. You will have to build a stand as illustrated (See Fig. 2) so

you can load the bar to whatever poundage you require. This must be done because the weight you can pick up off the floor to raise to the shoulders is not enough to sufficiently provide the body with the power necessary to overcome the resistance thrown upon it. The height of the stand should be about 3 or 4 inches lower than the height of your shoulders. The object is to make it necessary for you to bend the knees when getting under the bar to lift it off the stand. This "gets" your leg muscles nicely.

You should load the bar about 75 lbs. more than your best Two Hands Overhead lift. Step up to the weight and bend the knees as you grasp the bar, then by standing erect lift the bar off the stand holding the weight at the shoulders and try, with your arm strength, to prevent the bar from resting upon the chest. This done, just hold the weight at the shoulders until you count 6, then replace the weight back on the stand, and repeat the lift-off three or four times.

Next, hoist the bar, by means of a pulley, until it is about three or four inches lower than the height of your outstretched arm overhead, when standing erect. The weight should be about 25 lbs. more than the highest poundage you are able to lift overhead with one hand. In this case you grasp the bar with one hand by the center, which should be plainly marked, and try to stand erect beneath the weight when lifting it, as shown in Figure 3. If you keep your arm perfectly straight and locked at the elbow and the shoulder, you will have no difficulty in raising the weight the two or three inches required to enable you to stand erect under it. Hold it until you count four, then, by bending the knees, gently lower the weight back into the support of the ropes. The lifting action here is gotten from the power of the legs. They, being stronger than your arms, will straighten you.

Wonderful muscular action is given the legs and upper body as two or three attempts will prove to you. The next exercise is a progression on the last and calls for more physical effort. First let me explain that when the arm is about to leave the side of the body during the Bent Press, the point when you begin to lift to straighten the arm is the critical point of this interesting lift. Here is where your test of balance control is proven, and where the arm and back and shoulder muscles are brought powerfully into play. The following exercise will give you full mastery over your balance control and will safely develop and strengthen all the necessary muscles.

In this exercise I would advise you to have the weight at least 20 lbs. lighter than the heaviest poundage you are able to lift overhead with one hand. Lower the weight down to the height as shown in Figure 4. You will notice that it is the height at which the Bent Press athlete begins to straighten the arm. Your



Note: The slackened rope here shows the athlete pushing the weight to arm's length from the position here explained.

Fig. 4

object is to straighten the arm and lift the weight overhead from this position and come to the erect position holding the weight at arm's length overhead. This done, slowly lower the weight and sink back into the original position.

Just use enough weight to give you a workout but never strain. This exercise you should practice three or four times in succes-

sion. You will find it a great muscle and strength builder and it will equip you powerfully for the test. Above all, the external oblique muscles will develop enormously. These are the muscles that mean considerable to your general physical condition and bodily health, irrespective of the power they acquire to make you successful in the Bent Press. All good Bent Press athletes have wonderfully well formed external obliques. They are the muscles which partially flank the sides of the abdominal wall and roll over the hip bone into the groin.

The last practice exercise for this feat is also very important as it accustoms the body to handle the weight at the point of commencement, which is often a very difficult place. As a matter of fact the way you balance and handle the weight at this point usually spells success or failure in the feat.

Load the bar until it is 40 lbs. heavier than your ability to raise overhead with one hand. Lift it to the shoulder any way at all and balance on the hand with the upper arm well back and under control and the bar turned in a line level with the shoulder as shown in Fig. 1, Position 1. All you have to do is bend slightly to the side as though you were about to make the lift. Bend far enough over until you feel a slight tendency of the upper arm to leave the side, then stop and come back to the original position. Perform this movement several times in succession.

The best way to go about all this is to practice these four movements in the order given. This done, rest awhile and then practice going through the science of the lift several times with a light weight. After this is done, make a lift with two-thirds of what your best Bent Press performance is, and once every two weeks go out and do your best and see what progress you have made.

It is a very impressive feat and one with which you will be able to perform stunts that will amaze your friends. For instance, this method is the easiest for lifting a person overhead. If you can Bent Press 100 lbs. with one hand you will easily be able to lift a fellow weighing between 125 and 135 lbs. The manner in which you take hold to make this particular lift is simple. Examine the illustration, Fig. 5, Position 1, and see how the man to be lifted has clasped his hands behind his knees. The performer has passed his lifting arm between the subject's arms and his body, taking hold close up to the armpit of the far arm. The non-lifting hand is placed directly behind the nearest knee.

This is to help you get him to the shoulder. At the word "Go" ~~get~~ the subject to give a little jump, at the same time lift and turn under him as you release your grip on the back of his knee with your non-lifting hand. See Fig. 5, Position 2. Do it quickly and with lots of pep and you will be amazed to find how easy it is. I have taught many of my pupils within 15 minutes to lift a person weighing as much and more than their own body weight.

Once you catch the idea of this you will be all enthusiasm. It will become your most popular feat.



Fig. 5, Position 1

When Arthur Saxon first arrived in Britain to challenge Sandow, few believed he could Bent Press the enormous poundage he daily claimed to lift at each performance. These doubters he quickly silenced by inviting them all to come up on the stage and try their stuff. None were ever able to move the weight off the floor, let alone raise it overhead. There was one man who absolutely refused to believe Saxon. Yet, he was one of Britain's greatest athletes and a terrifically strong man. He was a Scotsman named Donald Dinnie. He believed Saxon employed some trick and repeatedly said it was not possible for any man to

lift 350 lbs. overhead with one hand. He also wished to make a wager that Saxon could not lift his (Dinnie's) challenge dumbbell with one hand. This dumbbell weighed in the neighborhood of 250 lbs. and was badly balanced. Many great strength athletes



Fig. 5, Position 2

had tried to lift it and every one had failed. When Saxon was showing in Glasgow, Dinnie invited him to his home and Saxon went. In due course Dinnie led Arthur to the basement where the famous dumbbell reposed and invited Saxon to try to lift it.

Arthur took one look at the dumbbell, then to the amazement of the Scot began to gather all the lighter dumbbells Dinnie had around and tied them onto the handle of the Scot's pet dumbbell. Without any loss of time Arthur raised the weight to the shoulder and according to Dinnie, Saxon Bent Pressed the whole awkward load of weights to arm's length. The total poundage was considerably over 300 lbs. After witnessing that performance Dinnie became an ardent admirer and friend of the great Teuton athlete.

Saxon officially raised overhead with one hand 371 lbs. and before reliable witnesses often exceeded this poundage. In the basement of Prof. Zaslay's barber shop, in London, Saxon made up a weight, by tying odd weights on to the bar of the weight, totaling 409½ lbs. He Bent Pressed this to arm's length but while the weight was overhead, several smaller weights fell off. The weight was then weighed and found to be 389½ lbs. But all witnesses agreed he had lifted the 409½ lbs. The fact that he still held the weight overhead when the smaller weights fell off striking his body, is a remarkable testimony and evidence of the great strength, confidence and masterly control of balance this man possessed.

The manner in which Saxon trained and built his stupendous body should be a lesson to every body builder and aspirant for great strength. He claimed, "You should build the organs first and they will take care of the muscles." He proves this in his spectacular lift. The Bent Press is a slow lift which demands muscular control and a great deal of endurance. He had so much endurance he was almost indefatigable. He further states, "The reason there are fewer successful strength athletes among the English speaking races is because of the mistaken idea they have that all they must do is lift heavy weights."

Hackenschmidt, too, claimed the English speaking people were badly informed on training with heavy weights and, to the great Maxick, the average British and American methods of training were contemptible.

Inch and Pullum are the most successful of British teachers and because of my personal record and the vast army of American strength athletes I am responsible for, I feel I can justly claim I have been the most successful in America. I admit and am proud of the fact that I owe a great deal to the contact I had with men like Saxon, Hackenschmidt and Maxick, and with study and further research work improved on all that I learned from them.

Speaking of Maxick reminds me that I was recently informed that Maxick had Bent Pressed over double his own body weight. It is a staggering performance and one I do not doubt. His physical power seems to be inexhaustible. When he was only 150 lbs. stripped, he officially jerked with two hands overhead, the terrific weight of 322½ lbs.

Strength is a wonderful thing. It is the one great natural gift the admiration of which rises above all prejudices of class, creed and color. You just have to admire it. I love to gaze upon a well-muscled body, but more than that I like to see the muscles

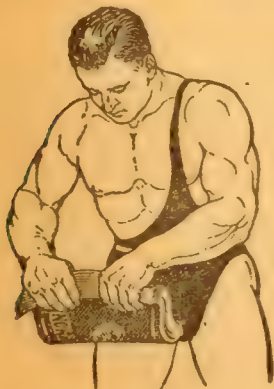


Fig. 6

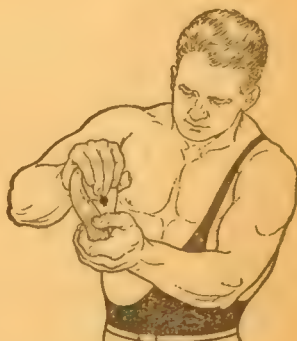


Fig. 7

be of the worthwhile variety. A powerful arm should have a powerful grip. It does not always happen that way, but a strong arm without a strong grip is reduced in power 50%.

Thomas Inch has one of the most marvelous grips I ever saw demonstrated by a man. His hands are so small he can wear a number 6½ woman's glove and wear a woman's ring upon any of his fingers. His wrist measures only 6½ inches. His remarkable grip, along with his massively-formed arm, proves there is no truth in the worn-out belief that men with small bones cannot have a powerful grip or build a mighty muscled arm.

One of the most popular feats of gripping strength is to tear a telephone book into halves. You grasp the book between the hands with the leaf edges facing up. See Fig. 6. Grasp the book with the hands as shown. Slip the pages so each overlaps the other, as illustrated, then begin to tear.

By slipping the pages you have less resistance and actually only tear each leaf in turn. When this is done press down and out on the book, using the knee as a lever to help break the book. Once you get the pages started and the body of the book broken the rest is easy.

Arthur Gay, the famous Rochester strength athlete, can tear a telephone book through the back binding first and tear the book up into quarters. Ottley Coulter, of Uniontown, is also an adept at tearing telephone books up into little pieces.

Tearing a deck of cards is a little more difficult. The cards must be held differently with something of an overhand grip. See Fig. 7. You really twist the cards into half. Albert Treloar, of Los Angeles, California, has been known to tear three decks of cards into half at the one time and tear off the corner of a deck of cards employing only the thumb and the index finger. These stunts take real strength, but once you master the knack of doing them they become much easier. Examine the illustration carefully and note how the cards are held in the hands. That is the secret of the whole stunt.

It is great to practice these feats as they help to build up the muscles, strengthen the sinews and put the real type of strength into the fibers of the muscles.

In all feats of strength that require the lifting of weight, whether it be an inanimate object or the lifting of a person, the laws of mechanics are very important. It once was a great hobby of mine to measure up a person and check up against his height and body weight and predict how much he should be capable of doing in various feats. Of course, there are many of the same height, weight and muscular proportions but the quality of their muscle is different. No two would be equal in performing a series of feats but I was generally able to estimate what each one was physically capable of. Many were surprised at my prediction, simply because their performances sometimes were much below the predicted ability, nevertheless after instructing them in the science of each feat they rarely failed to prove to their own delight and satisfaction that my predictions were correct.

I recall with interest a very strong young man who told me how he and his friends very much doubted that a certain poundage could be raised from a certain very difficult position. I asked him if the reason they doubted was because none of them could do it. He was frank enough to say he was the strongest of the group and he could not even move out of the position with no weight at all. This particular feat is the one where the Wrestler's Bridge position is assumed with a weight held at arm's length. From this position you are required to rise to the erect position holding the weight at arm's length throughout. I asked him, "Why can't you do it? The fact that you doubt it can't be done is no grounds for believing the feat impossible. I know of many strength athletes who have done it and performed the feat while handling a very imposing poundage." He was further confused when I explained that the feat was easier to do with a weight than it was by just trying to come to the erect position without a weight. I said to him, "Look here, I am going to make you prove that it can be done by making you right now come erect while handling at least sixty pounds." He was full of enthusiasm and before he left me he was able to come erect easily while handling a seventy-five pound weight. It is purely a feat of leverage. Of course, the stronger you are the more you will do, but it quickly proves whether you have the muscle that is flexible, supple and powerful.

First you must assume the Wrestler's Bridge position and draw the head and heels well under, particularly the heels as these should be drawn as far under the buttocks as possible. Place the weight behind the head and with the hands pull over until you assume the illustrated position with the weight in the dotted position. See Fig 8. From this position begin to lower the weight forward as shown but be sure to keep the arms straight. As the weight travels forward you will feel a forward pulling tendency similar to the feeling of someone standing giving you a helping hand to pull you up onto your feet. As soon as you feel this action try to rise. You will find it easier than you think. Of course, it will be necessary for you to practice in order to get the sense of the pull, but with a little perseverance you will master it. I might say that it is better to use a weight 5 lbs. heavier rather than have it too light. The light weight will start you but it rarely has sufficient forward pulling power to enable you to come erect. The heavier weight carries you through better. It may take you a little while before you can come erect with the weight held at arm's length at the completion of the lift, but one thing

sure, you will pass through the most impressive stage of the feat and finish with the weight held at the shoulders. As a matter of fact, Otto Arco, the famous strong man and hand-balancer, performs this feat balancing his brother in a hand stand in place of a weight. When he rises he drops onto his knees and lowers his brother to the shoulders raising him to arm's length after he has come erect.

In this feat I have come to the erect position while holding 180 lbs. keeping the weight at arm's length throughout. With practice a fully proficient man should be able to come erect from the wrestler's bridge position with a weight within 40 lbs. of his



Fig. 8

own body weight. It is a very spectacular feat and never fails to impress an audience.

I have seen the famous strength athlete, Edward Aston, come to the erect position holding a 56-lb block weight in either hand—which is very difficult. Aston has tremendously supple and powerful muscles. He can perform a somersault with a 56-lb. block weight held in each hand and does with the same weights what I consider is a remarkable feat though not as spectacular as the feat mentioned here. He performs the "Crab" while holding the 56-lb. block weights in each hand and comes to the erect position bringing the weights up with him.

Just try it. You will feel as though you are spiked to the floor and wonder how the feat can possibly be done. But like all other things, practice with the help of the right kind of muscles, will do it.

While we are at it, it might be a good plan to explain the muscles which perform this particular feat of rising with a weight from the Wrestler's Bridge position as in Fig. 8. You will be interested as it explains perhaps a little more clearly what I mean by having "powerfully supple muscles."

When you get into the Wrestler's Bridge position the muscles of your neck will be strongly employed and as you draw the heels well under the buttocks and raise the body up high, you will feel the muscles on the back of the thigh contract. If you have a weak abdomen or have been one of those exercise fans who has specialized on developing the muscles of the abdomen in preference to the other muscles you will feel in each case a counteracting effort. In the first place you will feel the muscles stretch and a sense of weakness follow in the abdomen. In the second place the muscles may be so contracted from excess abdominal exercise specialization, they will cause an uncomfortable feeling. In other words, until loosened up, these muscles will not be capable of stretching to the extent necessary for this particular feat. The muscles in the small of the back will flex powerfully. In fact, these muscles must bear most of the brunt. If they are flexible and strong they will lift you up and the muscles of the thighs will pull you forward. In all, the neck, legs, abdomen and lower back are the acting forces in this lift. Make the muscles of the stomach and back supple and strong and the feat will be quickly mastered. For the great good it will do you physically it should be practiced. It will repay you by making you tremendously powerful in positions where many strength athletes are almost helpless.

A man likes to feel that he is capable of demonstrating his strength anywhere. It is just natural for us all to hate to be stumped, therefore, more reason why every strength fan should know the easiest and best ways of performing strength stunts so he can display his abilities to the best advantage. I know many very powerful men who, because they are uninformed, are not able to demonstrate any more than 50% of their actual physical strength. This brings to my mind the Finger Lift. Here is a feat whereby a man can actually lift and carry more weight with one finger than he can lift off the floor with one hand. Off hand

this sounds impossible but it is just another of nature's fashioning of the muscles and the grip that makes it quite possible.

The middle finger is the strongest member of the hand. It has an almost unbreakable grip tenacity, one that is superior to the grip of the entire hand because of its location and construction and the manner in which the grip can be locked. In this lift it is necessary that you make a hook with an eye through which the middle finger can be inserted and the hook should be made short and bent close to the eye. The eye must be padded with felt particularly over the section of the eye where the hook begins, as a protection for the back of the finger. The rest of the eye should be well wrapped with electrician's tape so that the finger fits snugly when inserted through the eye of the hook. Push the eye close up to the knuckle of the hand. Never allow the hook to fit loosely on the second joint of the finger. The pull must positively not be carried in the crook of the middle joint of the finger. To do so is to minimize your finger grip 50%.

Do not get the idea that everything begins and ends the moment you have placed the finger through the eye. It just begins. The finger is practically only the pendulum but must be supported in its effort by the way you hold the arm and back and by the power of the legs. The free arm plays a very important part in this stunt, forming a support between the body and the legs and supporting the back as you lift.

The object to lift should be placed between the legs. See Fig. 9. If the object is bulky it would be advisable for you to stand with each foot upon a separate pedestal so you have more range to operate in. Place the disengaged hand upon the corresponding knee with the thumb and fingers pointing in between the thighs. The arm should be straight and also the back, the legs bent at the knees with feet firmly planted on the floor and spaced well apart. Insert the hook into the ring to which the object is attached and let the lifting arm hang straight. Crook the lifting finger well into the palm of the hand and begin to lift. Do not try to lift with the arm. Many do so and never succeed. The weight a person can lift by just employing the arm, bending it at the elbow, is almost negligible. The arm is only the connecting link—you lift by straightening the legs and the back. The back is greatly aided in its effort by pushing down on the knee with the non-lifting arm but be sure to keep the back flat and both arms straight. When you master this co-ordination you will surprise yourself at the amount of weight you will be able to lift.

On lifts requiring the gripping power of the entire hand most strength athletes make the mistake of wrapping the thumb around the bar which actually neutralizes the grip. The thumb should always be free, lapping the bar in the same direction as the fingers. This provides more surety of successfully making a lift using either one or two hands.



Fig. 9

• The Finger Lift is always popular due to the fact that a person can truthfully prove he can lift more with one finger than another can lift with one or two hands.

Beyond a doubt the greatest men in the world on this type of handling great poundages are Warren L. Travis, A. Nordquest, J. Y. Smith and Ottley R. Coulter. Travis has lifted some enormous poundages with the one finger as also has Smith. Ottley R. Coulter when only weighing 132 lbs. stripped could outdo most of the heavyweights in finger lifting, but he, like Travis, is very well informed on the mechanism of the body. They owe most of their success to their knowledge of muscular leverage and know just how to apply their muscular power. All the four men mentioned here are remarkable characters. Travis today is close to 60 years of age and I doubt if there is a man breathing who can equal him in any feat of finger, hand or back lifting. He is a splendid example of vital life. Smith is nearly 70 and when he was 60 years of age I refereed the tournament in which he won the strong man championship of the New England States, defeating many young strength athletes who had truly remarkable records. When Coulter was only 132 lbs. he competed in the Richard T. Fox tournament held in Brooklyn, N. Y., to decide the world's strong man question. Coulter finished second to Travis. He easily surpassed all the other men in the tourney, all of whom were heavyweights and represented the cream of the man power of the countries they represented. Coulter today is about 176 lbs. and still retains the tremendous muscular ligaments which are in

most cases thicker than those of the majority of heavyweight strong men. Thick, powerful ligaments easily make up for lack in dimensions but when the combination of both exists then co-operative power is supreme.

Coulter, like Travis and a few other strength athletes I know, always impressed me with the versatile quality of his muscular power. Place him side by side with the cream of the overhead lifters in a complete test of strength involving a physical test from every position and I doubt if he can be surpassed at his body weight. The majority of weight lifters specialize on 3 or 4 overhead lifts, which seems to completely let them out. In these few numbers they might surpass Coulter, but when it comes to lifting with the finger, the hands, back and legs or in harness lifting and handling heavy bulky objects like barrels and sacks, and in bending and twisting irons, he would smother them.

You may find it difficult to understand why many good overhead lifters would not be good at any other lift. You may argue that the overhead lifts prove his ability by the fine overhead lifting he is capable of. Quite true, but the fact remains he has only trained himself to those 3 or 4 lifts and his body has never been attuned to bear the enormous poundage which back and harness lifting compels. Of course, if he trains on these last named lifts he will naturally become proficient on them.

Bending irons requires one very important qualification—endurance. When a man performs any other lift except the Bent Press, it is quickly over—which is the reason for popular belief that weight lifters only have and are only capable of momentary spasmodic outbursts of strength. Many feats of iron bending take considerable time to complete. If your muscles lack endurance you will quickly tire out before the feat is done, regardless of how strong you may be. Therefore, it is a good idea to practice some iron bending stunts in order to fortify your muscles with enduring stamina.

A few years ago a Polish strong man created quite a sensation on the American stage with his spectacular iron bending feats. At the same time a Russian athlete impressed the British public with a similar performance, but both these men were incapable of performing the iron bending stunts once done by Charles Vanstittart. In my estimation he is the greatest of the iron benders. His gripping strength was actually gigantic. The sinews of his wrists stood out like heavy cables of steel. One thing sure, if you wish to acquire an unbreakable grip, thicker sinewy wrists



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

and arms, iron bending will help you wonderfully. You will enjoy the practice which prepares you for an almost innumerable variety of feats. A couple of the most popular stunts I will explain, the first of which we call *scroll bending*.

Just for a practice test take a 7-foot piece of flat iron 1 inch wide by $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick. Make a mark about 15 inches to 18 inches from the end and around this mark wrap a handkerchief, then insert the protected iron between the jaw and with the teeth grip tightly. See Fig. 10. Take hold with the hands on the bar and pull down on the long end until it is at right angles. This done, repeat the performance on the opposite end of the bar, but be

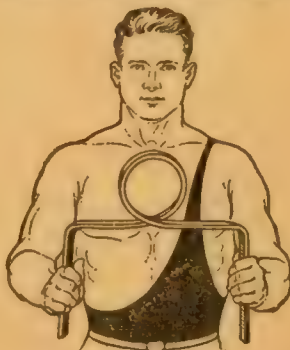


FIG. 13

sure the ends are both bent at the same right angles. Next place the end of the bar on the floor and step on it as shown in Fig. 11. Place the arm in position illustrated and proceed to wrap bar around the arm. Now pull the ends together as far as you can wrapping the bar around the arm as in Fig. 12. When you have gone the limit force the two ends together as much as possible. In order to complete the performance you will be obliged to change your grip. Let the right hand grip the left prong and the left hand grip the right prong. Pull hard allowing the ends to pass until you have made a complete loop in the middle of the bar as illustrated in Fig. 13. This will complete the scroll work in this particular feat. As you practice you will be able to make several loops on the bar.

Another spectacular feat is to wrap the bar of iron around the arm. In this stunt you pass the end of the iron between the left arm and the body. See Fig. 14 (a). In this case the body acts as a brace. Bend the iron around the arm and continue to wrap around the arm as much of the bar as possible. See Fig. 14 (b). As you become stronger use a heavier size of iron. This does not mean to use a thicker bar of the same width as the light bar as advised here for practice but increase the width along with the thickness. It makes the performance a little easier in proportion to the thickness. By this I mean if you used 1 inch width

throughout and only increased the thickness the increase would be too big a jump in most cases. Then again, it is the width which impresses the watchers more than the thickness does. It not only looks better but gives you more pressing space to push on.



Fig. 14 (a)



Fig. 14 (b)

Talking about iron bending reminds me of an incident that happened in France some years ago when Apollon, the French Giant, was at his best. He opened his act with a prison scene where the convict was making a dash for liberty. A high row of heavy iron railings separated him from freedom, two bars of which the great Apollon grasped and spread apart and through the opening emerged to make his bow and go through with his regular routine. Naturally these bars had to be taken to the blacksmith each day to be straightened. One day the apprentice said to the blacksmith, "Let us temper and harden these bars for a joke," to which the smith assented. When Apollon came to his act that night he fully expected the bars to be

the same as usual. He grasped them with his hands but to his amazement they would not move. From the stage wings his wife scolded him under the impression he had resorted to one of his nocturnal spells of laziness. Apollon wrestled with the bars until the perspiration rolled off him in streams. Finally he pulled them apart enough to enable him to squeeze his body with much effort through the bars, but the struggle had been too much for him—that night he was unable to continue with his performance. The jokers had taken an unfair advantage of Apollon, for in the first place the bars were so strong it is doubtful if any other man but Apollon could have done the feat. To temper the bars had made the feat almost impossible but it showed the calibre of



Fig. 15

muscle and endurance the powerful Frenchman possessed. The moral, if any, is, "Watch that no one plays tricks on you."

An iron bending feat I always liked was to wrap a poker around my neck. This stunt develops great neck, back, shoulder and arm power. You simply place a round bar of iron across the back of your neck and by grasping each end draw them together until the bar is squeezed into the neck. See Fig. 15. You can start with a long round bar about 3 feet long by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch and as you get stronger use a shorter bar. When you are able to wrap an iron bar less than 18 inches in length and no less than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter, around your neck you can figure you are pretty good and apt to stump most of the people you meet. You will have no difficulty getting it off the neck. Simply push the ends far enough apart so it slips off the neck.

You will be able to bend a heavier bar of iron across your neck than you can over your knee. When you pull on the ends see that one foot is ahead of the other and straighter, then lie back onto the bar as you pull with the hands, but above all see that the bar is laid across the base of the neck almost on a line with the shoulders. This provides a better bulwark for your concentrated arm power. You will be pleasantly surprised at the different "feel" given the arm muscles in this stunt. In fact, most of these bending stunts call for a different muscular action and what is most important is the fact that not only is the muscular action considerably prolonged but the changing grip position as the feats continue compels the muscles to prove their capacity for all-round strength by their sinuous movement. As a better illustration the man who tosses a weight to arm's length overhead does so with one quick spasmodic heave of the muscles and the rest is left to his quickness to "get under" the weight and straighten the arms. The muscular action in this case is carried out in one manner which never changes. The twisting and bending of iron works the muscles over their complete expanse and calls for an equal power of those muscles under action and that power must be exerted from the beginning to the end of the feat. The gripping power involved is usually great, which is the reason why all "iron benders" have powerful fingers, hands and wrists. They invariably have much better developed forearms than any other strength athlete, and their development is not confined to these muscular sectors but generally the entire body is influenced, particularly the shoulders. It is very easy for a body builder to adapt his training program so that it includes a little of dumbbell exercise, weight lifting, hand balancing and iron bending. The reason I mention hand balancing is because the "press up" from bent arms to straight arms has always been a favorite exercise and stunt of nearly every strong man I have known. It takes real strength to perform this feat. Of course, the heavier you are the more difficult it will be and the more strength required but it is worth practicing for the splendid triceps and deltoids the stunt develops. To mix up your training routine turns your practice into a series of pleasant feats and breaks up that monotony which sometimes makes exercise irksome.

Next to iron bending I think chain breaking is the most popular. Chain breaking sounds very impressive mainly because every one knows a chain must be strong. Breaking the chain over the arms and chest is about all this covers except breaking the chain with the hands. In these three stunts and as a matter of fact in all

chain breaking stunts, the type of chain used is the main thing. Never is a chain used that has welded links. It is almost impossible for a person to break or burst asunder a chain with welded links, unless a certain link is first treated with a chemical, which does not make the stunt an honest feat of strength. Acid will reduce the strongest welded link to a deteriorated weakness which will snap apart like chalk when the right pressure is brought to bear upon it, though never is a showman so foolish as to reduce the strength of the chain to such a weakness. He knows how to gauge this according to his strength and by the manner in which he holds the chain in his hands, is able to cause a twisting pressure which builds up a greater resistance over the weakened link than does a direct pull. But as we are more interested in genuine feats of strength in which as many can join as desire I will give •attention to them.

To comfortably perform chain stunts on the chest you really should do a little rigging up, because a chain does not provide a wide enough surface to prevent the chain from sinking into the flesh. When this happens you lose a lot of your chest expansion resistance. In order to offset this you should make a belt out of heavy canvas or leather to encircle the chest, fastening the ends together with elastic so that the belt will give with your chest expansion. When you place the chain around the chest see that it lies upon the canvas or leather protection. You will do much better and feel no discomfort.

The chain usually used is that made up with the "S" link or the unwelded link. You make a little hook or else spread the "S" end of the end link and hook it into the link on the chain you can best reach when you have pulled tightly on the chain so it is tight around the chest. First you must take a deep breath and then contract the chest by breathing out. When the chest is as small as you can make it hook the chain together and then by breathing in deeply and forcing out the chest by exerting the chest and the back muscles, break apart the chain. What really happens, if you have strength enough, is that the hooked links are spread out straight and the chain, becoming disconnected, falls apart. Of course, you must be careful in choosing the size of the chain to be used. Do not use one too strong; rather, use a light one until the muscles and the chest become better accustomed to the stunt. Then, as you become stronger and master the stunt, you can employ a stronger chain. This exercise is one which you will find very valuable for strengthening the walls of the chest and developing greater lung power and volume. The muscles on the chest

and the back will respond very satisfactorily to the exercise. If you know how to spread the latissimus dorsi muscles, which are the big powerful back muscles that spread the shoulders, you will become quite proficient at breaking chains on the chest. As in all cases practice makes perfect and by practicing this feat regularly, other feats of chain breaking around the chest will suggest themselves.

To break a chain around the biceps of the upper arm follow the same principles as in the last feat. You simply hook the chain around the upper arm as the arm is held out straight; then, by flexing the arm, that is, bending the elbow, the bicep contracts into a round hard lump which provides the pressure to burst the chain apart.

There is a very fine English athlete by the name of Pedly who was really marvelous at breaking chains. He has a wonderfully formed chest and a pair of the most magnificently formed arms a man could ever wish to look upon. For years he worked out with the Great Eugene Sandow, but Pedly was considerably more powerful than Sandow and would outdo the latter at any feat of strength. Pedly had the knack, like Marx and Vanstittart, of breaking chains with the hands. This feat is very difficult and takes considerable practice, patience and strength. There is a certain way to fold the links of the chain which creates within itself a powerful leverage upon the center link which cuts down the strength of the chain over 50%, then by employing the grip and arm strength the chain is quickly broken. How this stunt is done is too difficult to explain on paper. My experience has been that it is difficult to show the pupil and requires numerous careful demonstrations before the pupil actually gets on to it. One simple misplacement spoils the whole thing, therefore, I very much regret I must pass up explaining this particular method.

John Marx used to do a very impressive chain breaking stunt. He would stretch a short piece of chain between two uprights and with a blow of his massive fist break the chain. He was the only one I ever saw who successfully repeated this performance. When you strike a chain there is always a rebound which minimizes the force of the blow. By using powerful pulleys the chain can be held so taut most of the rebound can be taken out. The snap of the blow actually snaps the strained links. You need mighty tough hands for this though. The little finger on the right hand of Marx was badly shattered from demonstrating this very spectacular stunt.

I could entertain you for hours with stories and feats of strength but space forbids my going any farther. Nevertheless, to all my pupils is extended the privilege of receiving all the necessary information for successfully performing any feat of strength they may wish to know. Many take advantage of this privilege, which I am glad to see because it keeps alive and intense their enthusiasm for such things. However, in conclusion I would like to offer the advice tendered by such strength giants as Saxon and Marx who seriously advise all strength builders to first build their muscles progressively along the right lines of exercise and so cultivate the various component parts of their physical selves until the entire muscular body is fittingly equipped with supple, flexible, strong muscles. Then you can safely exert your strength by practicing feats of strength—this will act as a rapid stimulant to strength building and shape the muscles with magnificent contours. Strength will then become a radiant substance which you can enjoy to the fullest. But a course of training that does not completely cover this subject is after all only part of a course and cannot make of you all you physically wish to be. Through this book I hope to convince you of the thoroughness of my teachings and so inspire you to become one of my pupils. I can then build for you all the wonders of physical perfection which will mark you always as a genuine *mar.* of strength.

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